

# SPEECH OF ROBERT SMITH, OF ILLINOIS,

ON THE

## OREGON QUESTION.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES, FEB. 7, 1846.

Mr. SMITH addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: In rising at this late stage of the debate, on the proposition now before the committee, I have neither the vanity nor the egotism to suppose that I can say much that is new, or that will be interesting to those who may hear me; and could I be *certain* that the resolution introduced by the honorable chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs would pass this House without any amendments, and that it would be followed by the passage of appropriate bills to protect and secure our rights, and those of our settlers in Oregon, and all who are disposed to emigrate thither, I would content myself with simply voting for all such measures, and refrain from troubling the committee with a speech at this time. But as some doubt seems to exist in relation to this matter, I feel it a duty I owe both to myself and to those who gave me a seat in this House, to express my views *boldly and fearlessly* on this great American question. I agree with the venerable gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. ADAMS,] and other gentlemen who say that this is one of the most important questions whichever has, or ever will, come before an American Congress. And, sir, let me tell gentlemen that such is the magnitude of this question, and so strong and deep are the convictions of the people throughout the length and breadth of this country, that the whole of the territory called Oregon (included within the parallels of 42° and 54° 40' north latitude) belongs to the United States; and that the settlement and occupation of that valuable territory are of the utmost importance to the prosperity and harmony of the whole Union, and to the permanency of our republican form of government; that it will, like a mighty avalanche, overwhelm, or *politically bury*, all who obstruct or oppose the measures necessary for the consummation of this great object.

I come, sir, from one of the oldest settled portions of the great valley of the Mississippi—from that beautiful and fertile country *wrested* from the monopolizing grasp of Great Britain on the 4th day of July, 1778, by that bold, daring, and chivalrous soldier, George Rodgers Clark, of Virginia, and his intrepid followers. These brave men succeeded in capturing the British post at the ancient town of Kaskaskia, and compelled the cession of St. George to give place to the stars and stripes of our beloved confederacy. But for the sagacity, enterprise, and patriotism of General Clark and his gallant associates, one of the fairest and richest portions of this Union might still have been a dependency of Great Britain. The people of that region and of the northwestern States will ever keep in vivid remembrance that they owe the blessings of the liberty and freedom which they now enjoy to the success of Gen. Clark's expedition. They partake largely of that spirit of adventure which characterized the actors in that noble enterprise. They know well, sir, the perils and hardships incident to the settlement of a new country, and to their defence against the depredations of a savage foe. Many of

them, too, while fighting under the command of the immortal Jackson and the gallant Johnson, gained an experience that enabled them to bear witness that the tender mercy of British and Indian warfare is cruelty refined: but, sir, they would hurl with scorn from the high places of power *any* public servant who would shrink from the maintenance of the *rights* and *honor* of the nation, or from the defence—to the very last—of every inch of territory which of right blongs to us; even though it were a barren rock or steril sands. Our right and title to the Oregon territory has for years occupied the attention of our wisest and most enlightened statesmen and jurists. They have spoken, written, and published the result of their investigations upon the subject, and spread them abroad throughout the land. The people have read and maturely reflected upon this question; and they have deliberately decided that the territory is ours, and should be defended, if need be, (in the language of Jackson,) at the "cannon's mouth."

The question of title has been so ably and fully discussed, that I will not go into an elaborate exposition of it. As it is acknowledged by all, that Spain first discovered the northwest coast of America, and as we, by the "Florida treaty of February, 1819" came into possession of the Spanish title, I will go back to a period earlier than the discovery of Sir Francis Drake, by virtue of whose discoveries Great Britain lays some claim to this territory. And in doing this, I shall extract from the able reports of Mr. Cushing and Mr. Baylies, and the writings of other distinguished gentlemen who have examined thoroughly the early history and settlement of this territory.

"Without relying upon De Fonte, and giving away even the voyage of Maldonado, we have authentic proofs that Cabrillo (or Ferrelo) had explored to latitude 43 deg. in 1543; that Gali was at 37 deg. 30 min., if not at 57 deg. 30 min., in 1582; that the San Augustin was at the bay of San Francisco in 1595; that Juan de Fuca entered the strait now bearing his name in 1592, and that, in 1602, Vizcaino (that is, Martin de Aguilar,) surveyed the coast of California as far up as the river of Aguilar. Besides which, the outer coast of California was explored immediately after the conquest, by the orders of Cortes and of Mendoza, to Cape Mendocino, and was repeatedly visited by the Manilla ships—to provide a port for whom the expedition of Vizcaino was, in part, undertaken. And upon these various discoveries, and the proximity of their settlements in Mexico, the government of Spain proceeded, in the course of the seventeenth century, to make or authorize settlements in New California, so as to acquire all the territorial rights, by which any European government ever has obtained original claim to sovereignty of the soil in America.

"Yet Great Britain sets up claims of some sort on the northwest coast, in virtue of the voyage of Sir Francis Drake, who landed, in 1579, at a point on the coast of California, either in the bay of San Francisco, or more probably in that of Bodega, but it is not well settled which. Sir Francis Drake also approached the coast in 42 degrees or 43 degrees north, but without landing. One of the accounts of his voyage, indeed, (*The World Encompassed*,) says he went to 48 degrees north; but this is incompatible with other parts of the same book, and also with another of the old accounts, (*Famous Voyage*,) They tell the story thus: On the 3d of June, Drake was in latitude 42 degrees; on the 5th, he made land in latitude 43 degrees; but it had then come on cold and tempestuous weather, and he was com-



led to turn back, and so make a harbor in latitude 38 degrees 30 minutes. These are the figures given in the books. In addition to which, it may be stated that Hackluyt places the limit of Drake's voyage at 43 degrees, and Purchas at 45 degrees; and that neither Ledyard nor Harris carries him beyond the limit of Hackluyt.—(*Baylies's Report*, p. 15.)

Although Sir Francis pretended to take possession of the country, and to call it *New Albion*, this could amount to nothing as against Spain, the prior discoverer. England, touching at New California, could not acquire any rights whatever; for whatever right such an act may be deemed the European conventional law to occur, had already been appropriated by Spain. And Spain also proceeded to do that which England did not do, and which, by the same European conventional law, is deemed the consummation of the inchoate title gained by discovery—namely, the formation of settlements in the country discovered. To say this, therefore, of the absurdity of claiming title for England as against Spain by the piratical acts of a professional pirate—such as Sir Francis Drake, in most of his excursions along the American coast, was—to say nothing of this—if Sir Francis Drake had been a peaceful, or at any rate a just explorer in behalf of England, yet, according to the most liberal of all the rules of international law applicable to his case, his acts in reality conferred on his government no territorial rights whatever in America.”

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Don Juan Perez set sail from the port of San Blas, in January, 1774, in the corvette *Santiago* with Esteban Jose Martinez for a pilot, having orders to reconnoitre the coast from Monterey to the 60th degree of north latitude. They anchored in the road of Nootka, in August, 1774, first of all Europeans, and called it San Lorenzo. It was four years afterwards that Cook visited the same place, and called it King George's sound.”—(*Humboldt, Nouv. Esp. tom. i, p. 330.*)

The year following, (1775,) a second expedition sailed from San Blas, under the orders of Don Bruno Heceta, Don Juan de Ayala, and Don Juan de la Bodega y Quadra. The incidents of this voyage are known to English readers by the journal of the pilot Maurelle, published in Barrington's *Scellanies*. They explored the coast up to latitude 58 degrees, and were the first to discover the mouth of the river Columbia, which they called *Entrada de Heceta*.”—(*Humboldt, tom. i, p. 330.*)

Spain was the first European power that doubled Cape Mendocino and Cape Blanco, the first that visited the river Aguilar, the first that discovered the inlet of Columbia river, the first that visited Nootka sound, the first that discovered the strait of Juan de Fuca, and the first that formed an establishment, on any part of the northwest coast, from California to the forty-ninth degree of north latitude. Here the prior title to that of England, both by discovery and settlement.”

Very slighting accounts of these voyages are to be found in the English books, which so minutely describe that of Cook, who, on his third and last voyage in 1778, explored the coast of America from Nootka sound to Behring's strait, but, being posterior to the Spanish navigators, Perez, Heceta, and others of the older ones, could not by this voyage confer any rights of discovery on Great Britain. Moreover, Cook's explorations, it will be remembered, were from Nootka sound northward, and do not touch the country of Oregon.”

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Gray's voyages are intimately connected with the title of the United States to the possession of Oregon, and therefore deserve to be more distinctly recounted.

In the year 1787, Joseph Barrell, a distinguished merchant of Boston, in the State of Massachusetts, projected a voyage of commerce and discovery to the northwest coast of America; and Samuel Brown, Charles Bulfinch, John Derby, Crowell Hatch, and John M. Pintard, citizens of the United States, became associated with him in the enterprise. Two vessels, the ship *Columbia*, commanded by John Kendrick, and the sloop *Washington*, by Robert Gray, were equipped, and provided with suitable cargoes for traffic with the natives, and set sail from Boston in October, 1787. This expedition was regarded with much interest, it being the first attempt from the United States to circumnavigate the globe. The *Columbia* arrived at Nootka sound the 16th of September, 1788, and the *Washington* soon afterwards. Here they proceeded to collect furs. While on the coast, Captain Gray, in the *Washington*, entered into, and sailed some way up, the long-lost strait of Juan de Fuca, which Martinez, in 1774, had seen, but not entered. Captain Gray was then transferred to the *Columbia*, and proceeded in her to Canton with the furs collected, and at Canton took in a cargo of teas for Boston, Captain Kendrick remaining on the coast in the *Lady*

*Washington*. Thus far, the enterprise had not proved a gainful one to the parties, two of whom, Messrs. Derby and Pintard, disposed of their shares to Messrs. Barrell and Brown; who, with their remaining associates, decided, nevertheless, to despatch the *Columbia* once again, with Captain Gray, to the northwest coast. He accordingly proceeded thither, and, on the 7th of May, 1792, came in sight of land in latitude 46 degrees 58 minutes, and anchored in what he named Bulfinch's harbor, now called Gray's harbor. On the 11th of May he entered a large river; and, on the 14th, sailed up the same about 14 miles, and remained in the river until the 21st of May. To this river he gave the name of his ship, and the north side of the entrance he called Cape Hancock, the south side Point Adams. This is the first entrance and exploration of the river Columbia, the inlet or bay of which, however, had been seen by Ayala and Heceta, and called by them *Entrada de Heceta*, as we have before stated; and, so far as the discovery and exploration of this river from the sea can confer any claims of sovereignty, those claims, therefore, belong to the United States, both in her own right and in right of Spain. And, although the voyage was unprofitable to its enterprising projectors, it was highly important to the United States, as well by giving rights of discovery, as because it opened the way to a most valuable and productive commerce, which was afterwards pursued by other citizens of the United States.”

Vancouver himself, in his own narrative, states truly and candidly, with the frankness natural to a brave sailor, that he derived the knowledge of the existence of Columbia river from Captain Gray, who had previously visited it, and named it, and who spoke Vancouver, and communicated to him the fact. On the 29th of April, 1792, Vancouver says that he spoke the ship *Columbia*, of Boston, Captain Robert Gray; that Gray gave information of a river in 46 degrees 10 minutes; and he then proceeds to mention a previous voyage, that of the *Washington*, in which Gray had entered the strait of Juan de Fuca.—(*Voyage, vol. i.*) Afterwards, when Vancouver sent Broughton, one of his officers, to explore the river Columbia, he says, 'Broughton had for his guidance thus far up the inlet a chart by Mr. Gray, who had commanded the American ship *Columbia*.' In the same place, he uses the name of Point Adams, applied by Gray.”—(*Vol. ii. p. 53.*)

Mr. Buchanan, in his letter of the 30th of August last to the British minister, (Mr. Pakenham,) and at the close of his able and unanswerable argument in favor of our title to the whole of Oregon, says:

“Upon the whole: From the most careful and ample examination which the undersigned has been able to bestow upon the subject, he is satisfied that the Spanish American title now held by the United States, embracing the whole territory between the parallels of 42 degrees and 54 degrees 40 minutes, is the best title in existence to this entire region; and that the claim of Great Britain to any portion of it has no sufficient foundation. Even British geographers have not doubted our title to the territory in dispute. There is a large and splendid globe now in the Department of State, recently received from London, and published by Malby & Co., 'manufacturers and publishers to the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,' which assigns this territory to the United States.”

Having said thus much, Mr. Chairman, in support of our title to the whole of Oregon, I shall take occasion to call the attention of the committee to the opinions of many distinguished senators at the third session of the 27th Congress, on the bill introduced by one of the then distinguished senators from Missouri—now no more—[Dr. Linn,] “to authorize the adoption of measures for the occupation and settlement of the territory of Oregon, for extending certain portions of the laws of the United States over the same, and for other purposes.” The occupation and settlement of the Oregon territory by our government was a favorite measure of the able and talented Senator Linn; and he labored during his brilliant senatorial career with a zeal and an ardor deserving more favorable results than he lived to see accomplished. But his name will long live in the grateful remembrance of every patriotic American for the bold and noble course he pursued on the Oregon question. The bill of Dr. Linn met the same objections we now find urged against the prop-



osition under consideration—that it was inexpedient to legislate—that it would excite the indignation of Great Britain—and that war would result; whilst, if we would only cease to legislate, and go on settling the country quietly, it would soon fall into our hands. Mr. BENTON, in answer to some of the objections urged against the bill, and in defence of our title, said:

"On one point there is unanimity on this floor; and that is as to the title to the country in question. All agree that the title is in the United States. On another point there is division; and that is, on the point of giving offence to England by granting the land to our settlers which the bill proposes: on this point we divide. Some think it will offend her; some think it will not. For my part, I think she will take offence, do what we may in relation to this territory. She wants it herself, and means to quarrel for it, if she does not fight for it. I think she will take offence at our bill, and even at our discussion of it."

Mr. BENTON further said:

"I maintain that the passage of this bill, and these grants to the settlers, can give no just ground of offence to Great Britain; and this opinion is the regular deduction from the unanimous opinion of this chamber, that the title to the territory is in the United States."

In conclusion, Mr. BENTON remarked:

"I go now for vindicating our rights on the Columbia, and, as the first step towards it, passing this bill and making these grants of land, which will soon place thirty or forty thousand rifles beyond the Rocky mountains, which will be our effective negotiators."

England will find fault with us, do what we may—merely for calling in question the British right to the territory; but I, for one, am not to be deterred by any such considerations. I do not know but we may have to fight for our rights; but no dread of such a contest shall ever operate to deter me from a bold assertion of our title. I am in favor of the passage of a bill at this session, with a preamble, declaring the title to be in the United States. That title will be defended and maintained. I am ready to give pre-emption rights of land to settlers in Oregon. Do this, and hardy and enterprising settlers will speedily emigrate to the territory, and will prove themselves our best negotiators. I am against negotiation *in toto*: that is a field in which Great Britain has always beaten us, and always will.

I will also give the committee an extract from the speech on the same bill of the present distinguished Secretary of the Treasury, (Mr. Walker.) He said:

"The question now was, really, whether we are to assert our rights in relation to this territory, or to abandon them; whether we will maintain our title, or, by our own neglect, suffer it to be placed in doubt. Now, he was fully prepared to say that he was not disposed to abandon one inch of the territory claimed by this country on the north-west coast, from the 42d to the 54th degree of northern latitude. To the whole of this territory he considered the title of the United States indefeasible, and we should not abandon our claim to one inch of it. He was not prepared to abandon our title to an inch of the territory, on the ground that our assertion of it would lead to war, or on any other ground, because he considered that title indisputable and indefeasible. He believed it now to be the duty of Congress to assert our title; to declare to the world that we will maintain our rights; and will not abandon them. If Great Britain is to take offence at our declaration that we will maintain our rightful claim, her doing so would be no argument to him that we ought to yield."

Mr. Chairman, I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, (I have, however, heard that one of the family name has claimed to be one,) I, however, venture to predict that, if we ever get into a conflict with Great Britain; we will never make peace so long as that government continues to possess one foot of territory on this continent.

For the benefit of my whig friends, and to show that the Oregon question is no party question, I

will read short extracts from the speeches of certain distinguished whig senators during the pendency of Dr. Linn's bill.

Mr. CRITTENDEN was opposed to the "preamble" *"Believing, as he did, that our title is complete and unblighted, he would not sully it by any such proceeding."*

Mr. ARCHER of Virginia, said:

"He hoped the senator from Missouri understood that was not either opposed to the bill, or to the maintenance of our rights whenever there would be occasion to assert them. He only objected to the expediency and necessity of the preamble to the bill."

Mr. PHELPS of Vermont, said:

"As a member of the select committee, he should say that he did not consider the preamble to the bill, when pressed on the chairman, very important; but he was willing to retract, on the ground that it was necessary to satisfy the public mind. But now that the subject had been debated, and a question put on striking out the preamble, he thought better that it should be retained, than that any doubt should be created by striking it out."

All these distinguished senators united in admitting that our title was clear and indisputable; they were, however, opposed to the preamble of Dr. Linn's bill, chiefly because they feared that its insertion might, in some degree, prejudice our title, seeming to express a doubt on the subject. Whenever our title comes to be fully examined, all doubt on the subject must come to an end. Senator Linn's bill passed the Senate by a very large majority. This fact, and the arguments urged in its favor, are deserving of some consideration. I will refer to an eminent senator from South Carolina, [Mr. CALHOUN] who made an eloquent speech in opposition to the bill, because he deemed it impolitic to urge our claim *then*. Mr. Calhoun said that our title was so good that it stood in no need of a *hasty* assertion of it. He concluded by saying that if the bill were to pass, notice to Great Britain ought *first* to be given. While I do not by any means approve all the course of the distinguished senator on this question, I trust that he will yet be found coming to the rescue, whatever may be the final determination of Congress.

I might here indulge in some comments on the course pursued by certain gentlemen of the South in this debate; but it is not my intention to challenge members from the *South* or *North*, who see fit to propose this notice, with a want of patriotism or devotion to what *they* deem the best interest of the country. We have had too many proofs, assuming substantive forms of noble and generous deeds, that devotion to the interests of the whole Union to allow us to doubt their patriotism. And whatever course these gentlemen may take *here*, I have full confidence that, if war shall come, they will not *then* to inquire the cause, but will be found in front rank, defending the rights and the honor of our common country. I have more charity for the honesty of those who differ from me in opinion than some gentlemen seem to possess; I believe men may honestly differ on great questions. But members from the West have been charged with the desire of madly driving the country into a war with Great Britain by their "western furor, braggadocia," &c., pressing the question of notice. Is it to be characterized as vain *boasting* and *braggadocia* to assert here that we are able, ready, and willing to defend our rights, both in peace and in war? When we say that we believe and trust in the arguments advanced by our negotiators in relation to our title to the whole of Oregon, and declare our determination to aid in carrying into effect the recommendations of the President in his annual message, are we to be told that it is "demagoguism?" I wish



avoid war, if we can do so without compromising our rights or our honor; but sooner than wound either, I say give me war, with all its horrors. If we shrink from the maintenance of our rights, from an ignoble fear of war, we will show ourselves unworthy descendants of our patriot fathers! Did they, although a mere handful, shrink from asserting their rights, for fear of incurring the displeasure of England? If our form of government confers more blessings upon mankind than that of Great Britain, surely all lovers of freedom, all philanthropists, should exert their whole energies to secure Oregon, that those who inhabit it may enjoy the blessings of a republican government.

In listening to the ingenious and eloquent speech of the honorable gentleman from Kentucky, [Mr. G. DAVIS,] I was almost persuaded that the country watered by Frazer's river belonged to Great Britain. The honorable gentleman from Kentucky contended, with great zeal, that they had discovered and settled that country, and had as good a title to it as we had to the country watered by the Columbia river; and he argued that it would be a gross outrage now to attempt to take possession of that portion of Oregon. But near the close of the gentleman's speech, he contended that, by delaying to give the notice, and by going on and settling the country, we would, in time, be able to take the whole up to 54° 40'. As soon as I heard that, the whole effect of the gentleman's able and ingenious argument evaporated. I thought such a proceeding unworthy of a great and growing country like this. We ought to act in a more frank and manly manner. We should come out like men, and express our views and purposes without disguise. Like the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. WINTHROP,] I am not for the "hush policy." I want nothing like stage effect. I go for declaring our rights, and maintaining them. This is what the people expect at our hands.

It seems that gentlemen opposed to the notice think that, by not giving notice, we can go on settling and improving the country, and that England will remain passive; and that thereby we shall be the gainers. This view is based upon the presumption that the British government is at once ignorant, stupid, and imbecile. If England considers her claim to a portion of the country just, and worth retaining, does any one believe for a moment that she will remain inactive? Can any gentleman point me to the time, or to the place, when that government did not put forth all her power and energies to acquire and to secure territory? Do they suppose that the English ministry are not advised of all we say, and of all we do on this question?

The great majority of the American people believe that the whole of the Oregon territory rightfully belongs to us; that it is ours; and that we are called upon by every consideration of patriotism and love of freedom—by the duty we owe our patriot fathers—to come up now, boldly and manfully, and declare this fact to the civilized world—that we intend to terminate the treaty of 6th of August, 1827; and that after the twelve months shall have elapsed from the time of giving this notice, we will take possession of our territory, "peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must." This, Mr. Chairman, I believe to be our duty; and nothing short of this will satisfy the country; nothing less than this will redeem us in the eyes of the world, after the declarations we have sent abroad in relation to our claims to this country. If

the will of the people is to be disregarded in the adjustment of this great question, where is the benefit of our democratic or republican form of government? How is it better than a monarchy? Where is our boasted freedom? Where is the popular will of the masses? And echo will answer—"Where?" Gone, sir; gone! abused! violated! trampled upon! For myself, I have listened attentively to the arguments of the gentlemen who are in favor of delay, and opposed to giving the notice now; and, sir, for the life of me, I cannot see the truth of their conclusions. If giving the notice to England is cause of war now, it will be cause of war if given next year, or at any future time. If England intends to hold on to any portion of that territory, and to fight for it, it matters not when we attempt to dispossess them, war will be the result. It may be true, that for the last two years we have been increasing our population in Oregon faster than Great Britain has; but such will not be the result in time to come, unless we adopt decided and energetic measures to take and to hold possession of the country. Whilst we are willing to negotiate, England has no fears of results. She knows full well that she can out-negotiate us. Take, for example, the northeast boundary. But, sir, when they see that we claim the whole country, and come to believe that we intend at any future time to take possession of it, they will teach us that we have gained nothing by delay.

The President recommends giving the notice; and after alluding to the three unsuccessful attempts that had been made by the two governments, in 1818, 1824, and 1826, to settle this question by compromise, he proceeds to state:

"When I came into office, I found this to be the state of the negotiation. Though entertaining the settled conviction, that the British pretensions of title could not be maintained to any portion of the Oregon territory upon any principle of public law recognised by nations, yet, in deference to what had been done by my predecessors, and especially in consideration that propositions of compromise had been thrice made by two preceding administrations, to adjust the question on the parallel of forty-nine degrees, and in two of them yielding to great Britain the free navigation of the Columbia, and that the pending negotiation had been commenced on the basis of compromise, I deemed it to be my duty not abruptly to break it off. In consideration, too, that under the conventions of 1818 and 1827, the citizens and subjects of the two powers held a joint occupancy of the country, I was induced to make another effort to settle this long pending controversy in the spirit of moderation which had given birth to the renewed discussion. A proposition was accordingly made, which was rejected by the British plenipotentiary, who, without submitting any other proposition, suffered the negotiation on his part to drop, expressing his trust that the United States would offer what he saw fit to call 'some further proposal for the settlement of the Oregon question, more consistent with fairness and equity, and with the reasonable expectations of the British government.' The proposition thus offered and rejected repeated the offer of the parallel of forty-nine degrees of north latitude, which had been made by two preceding administrations, but without proposing to surrender to Great Britain, as they had done, the free navigation of the Columbia river. The right of any foreign power to the free navigation of any of our rivers, through the heart of our country, was one which I was unwilling to concede. It also embraced a provision to make free to Great Britain any port or ports on the cape of Quadra and Vancouver's island, south of this parallel. Had this been a new question, coming under discussion for the first time, this proposition would not have been made. The extraordinary and wholly inadmissible demands of the British government, and the rejection of the proposition made in deference alone to what had been done by my predecessors, and the implied obligation which their acts seemed to impose, afford satisfactory evidence that no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected. With this conviction, the proposition of compromise which had been made and rejected, was, by my direction, subsequently withdrawn, and our title to



the whole Oregon territory asserted, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments.

Whilst, Mr. Chairman, I do not consider this a party question, but a great American question, I am free to confess that I do not like to see a single democrat against giving the notice, and, at the expiration of twelve months, taking possession of the country; for, disguise it as you will, all who oppose these measures will be pronounced by the people to be on the British side of the question. And while I would urge upon the whig side of this call, by the considerations of patriotism and love of liberty which should actuate every American free-man, to go for extending the area of freedom over the whole of Oregon, I feel that all these considerations must operate with greater force upon the democratic portion of the House. The democracy believe that the people have virtue and intelligence enough to govern themselves, and that the representative of the people is bound to obey their will, or resign.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I am convinced that Mr. Polk owes his elevation to the distinguished station he now so honorably fills, more to his opinions on the Texas and Oregon questions than to all other considerations united. And, sir, in his election, I consider that the people decided both these great questions in the affirmative. What were Mr. Polk's views in relation to Oregon? Let an extract from his letter of the 23d April, 1844, written from Columbia, Tennessee, answer. He says:

"Let the fixed policy of our government be, not to permit Great Britain, or any other foreign power, to plant a colony, or to hold dominion over any portion of the people or territory of the United States."

The President in his "inaugural address," says:

"Nor will it become in a less degree my duty to assert and maintain, by all constitutional means, the right of the United States to that portion of our territory which lies beyond the Rocky mountains. Our title to the country of the Oregon is 'clear and unquestionable;' and already are our people preparing to perfect that title, by occupying it with their wives and children. \* \* \* To us belongs the duty of protecting them adequately wherever they may be upon our soil."

But, Mr. Chairman, we are asked why this "hot haste?" They urge us to let things remain as they are—to "bide our time"—and we will get the whole of Oregon. In answer, I have only to say, that those who believe in the right of instructions have no discretion in this matter. The sovereign people are calling upon their public servants to settle this vexed question by giving notice to Great Britain of our intention to terminate the convention of August 1, 1827, and to take active and energetic measures to protect our citizens and to secure the territory. And if war results from this course, on whom does the calamity fall? Is it not on the people? Who fight the battles of our country? Who defend the national honor? Whose blood, and whose treasure, have been poured out like water, in times past, to defend the nation against the aggressions of proud and haughty England? And whose will again be poured out, in the event of war? The people's: yes, the thousands who remain at home in time of peace, quietly and industriously tilling the soil and improving the country,—it is this class upon whom all this great responsibility and calamity (if such shall result) will fall. And, sir, are they not to have the privilege of directing their public servants what to do in this matter? I, sir, am one of those who believe that the "sober second thought of the peo-

ple" is seldom wrong; and I firmly believe that three-fourths of the people of this nation, if they could vote on the resolution now under consideration, would be found voting in the affirmative.

I am not, sir, for extending our laws over a single inch of territory that does not belong to us; and the alternative of war would not deter me from going to the very last inch of what is rightfully our own. Gentlemen may call this demagoguism—bravado—gasconade—braggadocio—and whatever else they may think becoming. I am responsible only to my constituents and to my God. I believe I know the will of those whom I represent, and I dare to do it, come what may. And as to Him who rules the destinies of nations and of men, I believe that He is on our side, and that He will bless and protect us as He has done in days that are past. Experience was the best light in which to look at the future. In all the wars we have thus far been engaged in, He has thrown His shield of protection over us, and blessed our arms with victory; and I trust, if we are again compelled to hazard a war for the maintenance of our rights in Oregon, we shall again experience the same happy result.

Gentlemen all contend that ours is one of the best governments on earth. Is there, then, a man who enjoys the peace and privileges, the happy security and freedom which distinguish the inhabitants of this land, who is not willing to risk something to confer the same blessings on the thousands who now, and the millions who will hereafter inhabit Oregon? He does not deserve the name of an American citizen if he would not. A man so selfish and so dastardly ill deserves the rich blessings he enjoys.

I deprecate all idea of calling this a party question. It should not be so considered or so treated. In my own State it is not a party question. My whig colleague, who represents truly the whig population of the western States and Territories, is willing to go as far for Oregon as he who goes farthest. He goes for the last pebble that reflects the light of an Oregon moon. This shows what the feelings of the great West are on this question.

I might adduce still stronger proofs. With the political party with whom I am in the habit of acting, the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts has not heretofore been very popular. They consider him as an eminent and a profound statesman; some of his public acts they applaud, but there are more which they disapprove; but now they say, with one accord, that if he continues his present course in relation to our rights in Oregon, his life will terminate in a blaze of glory. With them, this is a question which overrides all others.

It has been said, however, that this strong feeling about Oregon is assumed for political effect, and has been gotten up to aid the fortunes of a particular candidate for the presidency; in a word, that the Oregon question is neither more nor less than a great question of president-making. This is not the feeling in the region from which I come. True, in the West, no man would be elected a corporal who did not profess to go for every inch of Oregon. For no other reason is this feeling cherished, than from a determination to maintain our rights. All candidates and their pretensions sink into utter insignificance in comparison.

We boast of being the followers of Thomas Jefferson; and, as such, we ought to go for the greatest



good of the greatest number. So long as there exists a doubt in our minds on this question, let the people of Oregon have the benefit of that doubt. I implore gentlemen by their regard for the great principles of democracy, to give their hearty support to this truly democratic measure.

At the Baltimore convention, resolutions were passed embodying the views of the democratic party throughout the land.

The following is the one in relation to Oregon:

*"Resolved, That our title to the whole of the territory of Oregon is clear and unquestionable; that no portion of the same ought to be ceded to England or any other power; and that the reoccupation of Oregon and the reannexation of Texas at the earliest practicable period, are great American measures, which this convention recommends to the cordial support of the democracy of the Union."*

This resolution met the hearty response of the people in all quarters of the Union. I could cite the committee to hundreds of public meetings responding to the nominations made at Baltimore, and the resolutions passed in relation to Oregon. I will, however, refer only to the great ratification meeting in the city of New York, immediately after Mr. Polk's nomination:

*"Resolved, That the title of the United States to the territory of Oregon being unquestionable, we hold it to be the bounden duty of our government, as we believe it to be the sentiment of the united democratic party, that this territory should be preserved entire and undivided; that no part of it should be surrendered to any foreign power; and that early and effectual provisions should be made by law for its complete occupation, and for the protection and security of our citizens now settled in and emigrating to it."*

These resolutions embodied the views and opinions of the great mass of the democratic party, and I contend should have some influence upon the democratic portion of this House. I venture to say there is not a man on this floor who has not received numerous letters approving the ground taken by the President in his message, on the Oregon question. From those who are on the whig side in politics, this approbation could not have been excited by the President's doctrine respecting the sub-treasury or the reduction of the tariff. To what is this owing? It cannot be denied that it is owing to the bold, manly, and independent ground taken in relation to the Oregon question. Never, sir, has a message of any chief magistrate of this nation since the formation of the government, been more enthusiastically applauded and approved, than has the annual message of Mr. Polk. I have received the most decided testimony from my whig constituents, approving this to the letter. Surely, then, it ought to have some binding influence on the democrats in this House.

As to regard to this measure of notice now before the committee, I presume it will pass in some form by a large majority. Gentlemen doubtless are actuated by different motives: some, probably, will vote for it with a view to expedite negotiations; others, because the abrogation of the convention will remove an obstacle that now prevents the adoption of important measures for the occupation of Oregon. For one, I should prefer that those who are for compromising at latitude 49° would not vote for the notice at all. I should consider it one of the greatest calamities should the boundary be finally fixed at that line. Before I close my remarks I shall touch on this subject again.

Much has been said about our sleeping on our rights for thirty years. Because, in 1818, 1824, and 1826, propositions had been made on our part to settle the controversy by adopting the 49th degree,

gentlemen suppose that we are bound to accept those offers now. But the circumstances are different now from what they were thirty years ago. The value of the country was not then fully appreciated. Let me ask gentlemen from New England what they used to think about Illinois, and other States, twenty years since? Did they not then consider it a far-off country, of little value, and inhabited by semi-barbarians? Not half the acts of barbarity and cruelty have been perpetrated in Illinois and Oregon which were charged as having been committed in the valley of the Mississippi. The people of the East then knew nothing of the extent of the territory, and they believed the thousand fabulous tales related of western barbarity. There is a vast difference now. The value of the Mississippi is now properly appreciated. The change on this side of the mountains is not greater than that which has taken place to the west of them. At that time the value of Oregon was not known, its advantages were not appreciated. It was not then known that it was possible to open a communication from the Atlantic to the shores of the Pacific. Our negotiators on our side were willing to part with it on easy terms with the value of which they were not acquainted. These considerations were then all-powerful, do not operate now. Britain rejected these offers; and we are bound by what we offered then.

This question of title should be settled. It should be settled to our settlers in Oregon, and to those preparing to go there. Thousands are making preparations to go to that country, with the faith that it is ours as far north as 54° 40', and the government will assert and maintain that. Does any one believe that many of those who have gone, and who are preparing to go, would have supposed that the country was to be divided between our government and Great Britain? One government on the north side of the Columbia river, and the other on the south side? Such a division of things would, sooner or later, inevitably lead to difficulties and disturbances, which would result in war between the two countries. Then, sir, it must come in the settlement of this question. It is better that it come now than later.

Mr. Chairman, I am opposed to war; I am opposed to it; I consider it as a relic of the dark ages. I believe that to God there were some other way of settling disputes of nations; but this is the manner in which we are sometimes forced to defend ourselves. While I deprecate war, as an enormous and evil, I do not consider it the greatest of evils. What do we owe our present system of government? How has our republic attained to its present greatness? Is it not the result of war? Had it not been tamely submitted to the exactions of Great Britain, what would now have been our condition? We have made greater sacrifices for freedom than we have for Oregon. For liberty we have pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their honor. All was jeopardized freely for liberty for the possession of a comparatively sterile land, not near so fertile or valuable as Oregon.

How long could peace be maintained, if the British were to settle on one side of the Columbia and British subjects on the other side? I ask gentlemen to reflect on the probable consequences of a state of things. But in reply, I hear it said, have we maintained peace for so many years on the Canada frontier? There is no parallel between the two cases. The one country is hardly



much less fighting for; and yet how often the most threatening difficulties arisen? And will it be in Oregon twenty years hence, its population will consist of millions, instead of the handful of people who are sparsely scattered through it now? Can gentlemen suppose that two nations, such as England and the United States can occupy so important an extent of coast, and a country that will some day be the largest cities in the world, without danger of collision? Collision is as inevitable as that night day. It will come: the spirit of our people will rather court it. Canada will one day be into this Union; and California, in time, will be into this government. This is destined to be an ocean-bound republic." Yet I would not see the taking of any step which is not perfectly consistent with the observance of good faith. A country must come to us in the very nature of itself. All I ask now is, that Congress shall lay our own laws over our own territory—a territory which seven-eighths of the people believe to

have heard stated, with much humor, what is a "masterly inactivity." I will not say who are opposed to this notice are in favor of a "masterly inactivity" as that described much force and effect by the honorable gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. STARKWEATHER;] but I will say if gentlemen would use the same masterly inactivity in defending our right to Oregon as is manifested in obtaining the floor to talk about it, the battle will be nobly fought, and the victory speedily won. The corporal's guard of British subjects would be found in Oregon after the expiration of the thirty months' notice.

Here read an extract from the speech of the gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. BAYLY.] He says: "The British attach no importance to Oregon, except for the sake of carrying on the fur trade. That is in a rapid decline, and when it disappears the English will disappear from Oregon."

He is mistaken in relation to this matter. They are directing their attention extensively to agriculture. I will now leave to give an extract from Captain Spaulding's Narrative of the Exploring Expedition, in which he makes the following statement:

"In connection with the company's establishment at Nisqually we have a large dairy, several hundred head of cattle among them seventy milch cows, which yield daily a supply of butter and cheese: they have also large quantities of wheat, peas, and oats, and were preparing the potatoes. These operations are conducted by a dairyman brought from England expressly to superintend these affairs. A few Indians are engaged in attending the flocks, and the company's servants are almost all employed as laborers.

"I have mentioned these agricultural establishments as connected with the Hudson Bay Company, and they are in fact, but as their charter precludes their engaging in other business, another company has been organized in connection with the 'Puget Sound Company,' the shares of which are held by the officers, agents, and servants of the Hudson Bay Company, and its officers are exclusively employed among them. Dr. McLaughlin, for instance, is the physician and governor of Fort Vancouver, on the part of the Hudson Bay Company, and has the entire management of its affairs. His salary is five hundred pounds.

"The capital of the Puget Sound Company is five hundred thousand pounds, divided into shares of one hundred pounds each. Only two hundred thousand pounds of this capital are paid in. The operatives of this company are in the large number. They began by making large imports of stock from California, and some of the best breeds are now in England. They have also entered into farming on an extensive scale, using as laborers the servants of the Hudson Bay Company, who are bound by their con-

tracts to do all manner of service that may be required of them, even to the bearing of arms.

The servants of the Hudson Bay Company are abandoning the fur-trade, and turning their attention to agricultural pursuits. There is no question of the fact; it is susceptible of proof. Captain McNeil, an American speculator from Boston, a shrewd and enterprising man, had gone there, and in a few years had made sad inroads on the profits of the company. What were they to do? Unwilling to apply open force, they bought him out. The facts only go to show that when an American of talent and enterprise goes to settle in that country, they immediately endeavor to enlist him in their service. In the case of McNeil they succeeded, and he is now an active partner in that company. Such is their policy. They are doing all they can to get the country permanently settled.

To illustrate further the value of Oregon for agricultural and other purposes, I will give a few extracts from the journal of Captain Spaulding, of the ship "Lausanne," in the year 1841. In speaking of the settlement at Fort Vancouver, and of Dr. McLaughlin, chief agent of the Hudson Bay Company, he says:

"The doctor has been very successful in the introduction of domestic animals. He first brought a few cattle over land from California, and, as he seldom has any slaughtered, they have now increased to about seven thousand in seven years. He has also introduced sheep, some of which are of the finest species of the Merino and Saxony breeds. I saw a flock of one thousand at Vancouver, the finest and fattest I think I ever saw. He has about two thousand at Vancouver, and thinks Oregon peculiarly adapted for growing wool. He has also a large garden adjoining the fort, containing about four acres, filled with the choicest fruits, viz: apples, pears, plums, cherries, strawberries, gooseberries, currants, &c., and vegetables of almost every description."

Speaking of salmon in the Columbia river, and all its branches, he says:

"They are literally alive with salmon in the summer months, which ascend to the fountain head. The company take about one thousand barrels per annum, three hundred of which the doctor gives away every winter to keep the Indians alive.

"I have no doubt that ten thousand barrels of salmon might be taken from the Columbia and its branches, without at all diminishing the stock, independent of what is required for the support of the Indians. Salmon constitutes their principal food, and no doubt ten thousand barrels are annually taken by them. Indeed, the whole northwest coast, from the Columbia river to 60 degrees, has every river and brook that is deep enough for a salmon to enter, filled in the summer season. A gentleman, whose veracity is undoubted, told me that he had seen Frazer's river, in Puget's Sound, for miles so filled with them, (the water being about three feet deep,) that you could not step without actually treading on them. The salmon of the north, however, are not so large, fat, or fine, as those of the Columbia river; for those taken from this river are, no doubt, the best in the world. Some of them will weigh fifty pounds; the average weight is about eighteen or twenty pounds."

In speaking of the fur trade, he says:

"The Hudson Bay Company has an exclusive monopoly of all the fur trade north of the United States, from Hudson's bay on one side, to the Pacific and Russian settlements on the other; and have a very large number of employes, who traverse this immense region in every direction, having posts or stations all over the same; indeed, they have spread a complete network throughout the length and breadth of the country. As they have the fur trade entirely in their own hands, they husband their resources, and only bring out an average quantity of furs each year; and when they become scarce at any one post, they remove from there, so as to give the beaver and other furs time to resuscitate. The company consists of eighty numbers, or shares; eight of the stockholders reside in England, and the others in the Oregon country. Each chief agent, and agents of each individual post, are shareholders. The fur trade is entirely monopolized by this company; but not content with this, they are turning their attention to every other branch of business. For instance, they have taken possession of al-



most every eligible spot in Oregon where there is a *water power*, or a good *site* for *factories*; they have selected out the *finest sites* for *farms*; they have erected mills—both saw and flour mills—with a view of supplying the Sandwich islands with lumber and flour, and the Russians at the north with flour and butter from their farms; they are in fact grasping at *everything*. They are now about establishing a post at the islands, as also in California; and a Mr. Simpson has been sent to both these places to effect this object, their instruction being to monopolize the entire trade of both places for the sale of English goods, lumber, flour, butter, &c.; and unless our government insist on our just rights, and drive them out of the Columbia, they will certainly succeed in driving all the American commerce from both the islands and California, as they have already done from the northwest coast. Their resources are immense, and their ambition unbounded. But, would they confine themselves to the region north of the United States, we should have less reason to complain, notwithstanding they are using our just means—means that properly belong to the people of the United States—to annihilate our trade in the Pacific, while upon the land they are cutting the best timber, and improving the best soil in Oregon, besides having arrogated to themselves the almost exclusive occupation of the Columbia river. Nor does this selfish grasping at all satisfy them; for they annually send a large party through the acknowledged territory of the United States to California, to trap beaver and kill sea otter."

Captain Spaulding, in the same journal, after giving numerous instances of the barbarity and cruelty of the trappers of the Hudson Bay Company towards the *Indians*, and the inhuman and cold-blooded murders committed by them, says:

"Since then, as would naturally be expected, they (the *Indians*) had been at enmity with the whites. That these irresponsible servants and agents of this monopolizing British company should be suffered thus to murder, destroy, and rob these *Indians*, and enrich themselves, through the neglect of our government, whose duty it is to protect these poor, defenceless, weak, and wretched beings, is what no man, as it seems to me, who has the blood of an American coursing in his veins, can or ought tamely to submit to. Is it not high time that our government, after so long a delay, should arouse itself to the protection of its own interests in Oregon? For, if it sleep but a little longer, that valuable territory is certainly lost to us forever. Give the English only the north part of the Columbia river—let them plant ten guns upon Cape Disappointment, and all the navies in the world could not take the command of the river from them. The cape and Tongue point are two perfect '*Gibraltars*' on the Columbia; and the Hudson Bay Company have already taken possession of the latter, as they have also of every other eligible spot on the Columbia."

Captain Spaulding says it is the prevailing opinion in Oregon that the grasping ambition of England will not stop short of the acquisition of California, with a view of possessing themselves of the bay and harbor of San Francisco, the finest on the whole coast of the Pacific for a naval depot, being accessible at all times for ships of any draught of water. In speaking of the colony from the United States settled on the Willamette river ninety miles above its mouth, he says:

"It is the finest grazing and wheat country in Oregon. At present (1841) it consists of about seventy families, who raise considerable grain, and have about three thousand head of cattle. The mission last year raised one thousand bushels of wheat, and made butter, cheese, &c., enough for their own use. They have five hundred head of cattle and two hundred horses; and last year they sowed four hundred bushels of wheat, one hundred and twenty bushels of peas, and planted a large quantity of potatoes and vegetables of all descriptions."

"The extent of the country comprising the Willamette valley is about three hundred miles long and two hundred broad, interspersed with ravines of wood, generally in sufficient quantities for fuel and fencing. The land, in its natural state, is usually ready for the plow, and is producing from twenty-five to forty bushels of wheat to the acre; and the climate is so mild, that the cattle subsist in the fields without fodder or shelter of any kind being prepared or provided for them through the winter. Salmon can be taken at the Willamette falls (which, however, the British have taken possession of, and compelled our people to build their mills at the falls above) with little trouble, from May to September, in almost any quantity."

I have no hesitation in saying that ten thousand barrels might be taken per annum. Probably no place in the world offers greater inducements to emigrants. Provisions might readily be procured to support one thousand emigrants at any time."

I think Mr. Chairman that I have clearly shown that the honorable gentleman from Virginia was in error, in believing that Great Britain valued this country only for its furs, and that the territory is of immense value for agriculture alone. Of its commercial advantages, which have been so fully set forth by gentlemen who have preceded me in the debate; I will only say, that the most sanguine friends of Oregon have not overrated these advantages, and time will prove my prediction correct.

Let me here quote a short extract from a speech of the distinguished senator from Missouri, [Mr. BENTON,] who has given this question much attention, and whose opinions are therefore entitled to great weight. After giving a glowing description of the beauty, grandeur, and fertility of the country, he says:

"Such a country is formed for union, wealth, and strength. It can have but one capital, and that will be a Thebes; but one commercial emporium, and that will be a Tyre, queen of cities. Such a country can have but one people, one interest, one government; and that people should be American, that interest ours, and that government republican. Accursed and infamous be the man that divides or alienates it."

We will gain nothing by withholding the notice, and meanwhile it is our duty—we owe it to our own hardy pioneers—to quiet the question of title. It cannot be disguised that the feeling which prevails in that part of the country from which these emigrants go, is, that the territory is ours, and that we are going to protect it by our laws. The emigrants themselves believe it, as firmly as if it were already written in the statute-book. They went there in the same spirit in which the pilgrims came to Plymouth with the same patriotism, the same love and admiration of free government, and the same desire to enlarge the area of freedom.

I had intended to say much more on this subject, but I perceive that my time is fast elapsing.

I regret that the correspondence between our Secretary of State and the British envoy came in before I had an opportunity of making the remarks I wished to submit to the committee. I would not have it understood that anything, from any quarter, would have any weight with me, beyond its own intrinsic truth. I was, however, glad to learn that the President had refused to arbitrate this question in this the people will triumphantly sustain him. But I feel it to be due to myself and to my constituents, to declare, that—much as I venerate the character and standing of our distinguished chief magistrate—if the offer made by him of latitude 49° as a boundary line had been accepted by the British minister, the people of the West would have denounced the act in such terms of censure as would have made all future presidents tremble. I regret exceedingly that Mr. Polk ever made this offer. I have no doubt he was actuated in that offer by the purest and best of motives—in my judgment there are few with purer heads than his, or purer hearts; but he allowed sincere deference for the acts of his predecessors to peril his own popularity. The offer, happily, was not accepted, and no very serious consequences have ensued. Had it been accepted, this administration would have been forever prostrated—as will be any other that ever hereafter shall surrender a single inch of American soil, the title to which is clear and unquestionable.